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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2509

COMMITTEES  
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AGING

June 17, 2020

Mr. Sundar Pichai  
Chief Executive Officer  
Google, LLC  
1600 Amphitheater Parkway  
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

Google’s decision to threaten the conservative publication *The Federalist* with removal from the Google Ads platform—based on, apparently, the contents of its comments section—is startling, but apparently just the latest instance of Google’s long pattern of targeting any perspectives that deviate from its preferred party line.

Your company is well aware of the central role played by advertising in the modern online ecosystem, and has spent years amassing an enormous trove of internet users’ data through the Google Ads platform. That, in turn, has granted your company vast powers to shape what users see, believe, and buy. Given the breadth of Google’s data collection practices, the power of Google’s behavioral advertising toolkit, and Google’s sheer market dominance, publishers are forced to do whatever your company demands in order to effectively serve their audiences. Now, your company is attempting to further manipulate the information marketplace by transforming advertising platform access into a cudgel wielded against dissenting voices.

An NBC News report<sup>1</sup> lays the responsibility for this move at the feet of the “Center for Countering Digital Hate,” a UK-based think tank devoted to squelching speech it disagrees with. The Center’s mission statement is to “encourage antisocial online behaviour to be met with opprobrium and consequence both on- and offline,” and the Center seeks to ensure that speech not meeting its standards will “lead to serious offline consequences.”<sup>2</sup> In particular, the Center runs the “Stop Funding Fake News” website,<sup>3</sup> which includes websites like Breitbart and American Greatness among its media targets. The Center demands that outlets be blacklisted by advertisers for such spurious “offenses” as criticizing dominant narratives surrounding climate change.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/google-bans-two-websites-its-ad-platform-over-protest-articles-n1231176>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.counterhate.co.uk/socialising-social-media>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.stopfundingfakenews.com/the-briefing>

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/SFFakeNews/status/1221833762046128128>

Foreign dark-money groups like the Center have no place in adjudicating American political discourse. And making matters worse, NBC proudly *claims responsibility* for bringing the Center's faulty work to Google's attention.

Moreover, it is profoundly disingenuous for Google to insist on applying a standard to other companies that it disclaims for itself. Google and other technology companies routinely rely on the protections afforded by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to evade responsibility for any third-party content posted on the platforms they offer. Now, Google apparently declines to extend a similar protection to those companies that rely on its own services. And the hypocrisy does not stop there: if the contents of a website's comments sections are sufficient to declare that site offensive and banish it from Google's platform, one wonders what to make of the cesspit that is the comments section of YouTube. In short, Google demands minimum oversight for itself, but maximum power over those who use its platform.

None of this, apparently, matters to Google. Instead, what's driving Google's policy appears to be little more than the politically-motivated opinion commentary of a foreign think tank, as filtered through a legacy media organization bent on muzzling its rivals. If conservative outlets are not welcome on the Google Ads platform, your company should have the courage to say so.

This long pattern of discriminatory treatment must stop. It is well past time for Congress to act. And I assure you that Congress will.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Josh Hawley  
United States Senator